

FOUR RIVERS ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2011 NEWSLETTER



Hi everybody. As I sit here listening to the wind blowing outside on this cold evening I began to think about what has happened with us this past year. We wrote and approved our new bylaws, published two new full-color booklets; *Pacheco State Park Self-Guided Springtime Hike* and *Spring Wildflowers of Pacheco State Park*, once again funded the popular Path of the Padres Hike, participated in special events at Pacheco State Park and San Luis Creek, and renewed our contract with State Parks. We are developing large posters to be used at events and at the Four River Sector office. We will be funding Path of the Padres Hikes again next year. We also are planning on hosting two special members only events next year—ideas are; guide led bird hikes, a special Path of the Padres Hike, a guide led Great Valley Grasslands vernal pool hike and picnic, and an astronomy night. I am looking forward to the opportunities that 2012 will give us. – Newsletter editor, David Milam

UPCOMING EVENTS REMINDER - All dates are tentative

pending park staffing and rainfall amounts. Hopefully I can have the dates finalized in time for our springtime newsletter. You can also get information by calling the parks Four Rivers Sector at (209) 826-1197.

Path of the Padres Hikes – reservations begin in Feb. and hikes begin late Feb or early March

Annual Wildflower Day at Pacheco State Park – usually around April 1st

Wildflower Hikes at Pacheco State Park – weekends in April (except Easter)

Kids Fishing and Fun Day at San Luis Creek – May

Kite Day at Pacheco State Park – June

Great Valley Grasslands vernal pools – now through March for waterfowl, mid April through the end of May for wildflowers.

USFWS Arena Plains Wildflower Tour – usually early April (209) 826-3508

Springtime wildflowers begin to bloom in February

Bird watching in our area is great year around. The winter months are a great time to see all the waterfowl. Great Valley Grasslands, US Fish and Wildlife Service lands, and State Wildlife Areas, Los Banos Creek, and O'Neill Forebay are all good places to view them. For migrating warblers and other songbirds the Basalt Campground, San Luis Creek picnic area, Pacheco State Park, and our river parks are good bets.

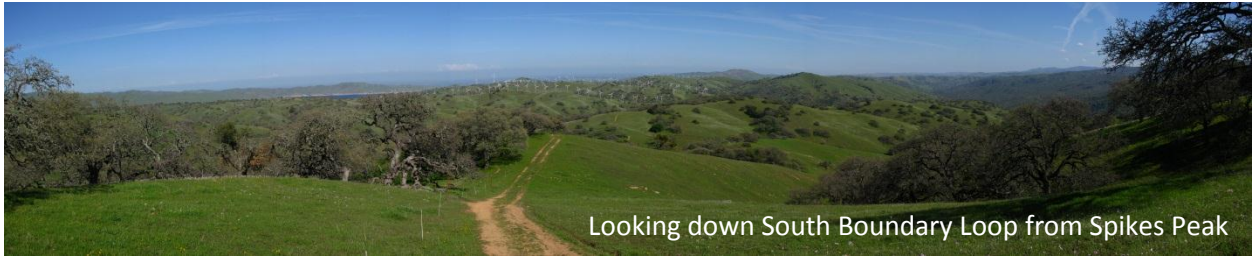
Four Rivers Association Annual Members Meeting has been set for February 18, 2012. FRA Director and retired ranger David Milam will be giving a short presentation on local wildflowers followed by some type of outdoor activity to be decided later. A potluck lunch will also occur. All FRA members will be sent an invitation when more details are finalized. All members are encouraged to attend. Hope to see you there!

Director's Meeting Update

1. Much discussion on how to increase membership. It was decided that everyone that makes a reservation for the Path of the Padres Hike will be automatically enrolled as a FRA member for 1 year. Also we decided that all new first year memberships will be free. Presenting two members-only events will hopefully attract new members.
2. Still working on a webpage and development of large posters to assist us in getting the message out about who we are and what we do.

Spikes Peak Trail - second in a series

One of my favorite trails at Pacheco is Spikes Peak Trail. It begins by heading due south from the picnic/parking area. The first half mile can be seen from the parking lot and is relatively flat. Once you cross over the hill the trail turns right and soon begins to climb steeply up the ridge line. This trail continues following the ridge top for another 2 ¼ mile until it arrives at Spikes Peak, the highest point in the park at 1927 feet. The actual peak is located a few feet to the west of the trail. Here you will find a one-of-a-kind marker nailed to an oak tree. Just a few feet beyond the peak Spikes Peak Trail meets with South Boundary Loop (east and west) and Mountain View Trail and Diamond Lake Trail. From here everything is steep downhill. I like to turn left here



Looking down South Boundary Loop from Spikes Peak



South Boundary Trail and fence line

and take the east end of South Boundary Loop to Bear Hide Lake. South Boundary Loop Trail follows the southern boundary of the park. The loop eventually meets up again with the



Bear Hide Lake

southern end of Spikes Peak Trail. From here it is a very steep 0.7 mile to the top of Spikes Peak where you can retrace your steps back to the parking lot.

Since this is a ridge top trail the views are great.



On good, clear springtime days you may be able to see all the way across the San Joaquin Valley to the snow-topped Sierra Nevada Mountains.



To the north you can catch sight of Mount Hamilton and Lick Observatory just east of San Jose.

The scenic vistas to the south include Cathedral Peak, Saint Mary's Peak, and Mount Ararat, ...



You can usually see quite a few hawks soaring nearby. Also seen are Golden Eagles, Turkey Vultures, Ravens, Scrub Jays, Yellow-billed Magpies, Western Bluebirds, Lark Sparrows, Savannah Sparrows, House Finch, Dark-Eyed Junco, Bullock's Oriole, Ruby-Crowned Kinglet, Oak Titmouse, California Quail, Acorn Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe,



Western Kingbird and others (there are over 100 species of birds found in the park). I have also had the pleasure to see Black-Tailed Deer, Tule Elk, Badgers, Bobcats, Ground Squirrels, Coyotes, Cotton-Tail Rabbits, Western



Fence Lizards, Southern Alligator Lizards, Rattlesnakes, Gopher Snakes, California Red-Sided Garter Snakes, and numerous butterfly species during my hikes. Being on the ridge is great for the views but sometimes it can get quite windy. If that is the case then you may want to opt for the return route via the Canyon Loop

Trail I talked about last issue. During the spring months you should be able to see many of the parks wildflower species. The hillsides are often covered by great splashes of color provided by California

Golden Violets, California Poppies, Goldfields, Shooting Stars, California Buttercups, Filaree, clumps of Woolly Mule Ears, bright red spiny California Thistles, Chinese Houses, and a couple of species of Lupines and Larkspurs among others. By the time you get back to your vehicle at the parking lot your legs will be feeling the almost 8 ½ miles they have hiked and the 2145 ft elevation gain and loss they have accomplished. But then you can just smile, remember all the beautiful things you have just

enjoyed and congratulate yourself that you have done it!



Be sure to take 1-2 quarts of drinking water since none is available on any of the trails in the park. It is also advisable to wear a hat and use sunscreen for protection. Cell phones may work on some of the ridgetop trails if conditions are right. During the winter and spring months cattle grazing takes place within the park. If you find a gate open please leave it open, if you find a gate closed please close it again after passing through. There are some electrified fencing during the grazing period. **DO NOT TOUCH THE SINGLE WIRE ELECTRICAL FENCING!**

Pacheco State Park

By Betty Wong, State Park Ranger

Wow! Who said it's too hot to visit Pacheco State Park (SP) during the summer?

This summer seemed to be cooler than most summers at Pacheco SP. A few days of high 90 and low 100 degree temperatures; most mornings were overcast with the coastal fog on top of Pacheco Pass which help relieve the hot afternoon temperatures.

For those who decided not to visit Pacheco this summer, here is what you missed.

The spring excessive rainfall brought abundant food for Pacheco SP wildlife. Wildlife viewing this summer was spectacular throughout the park with Tule Elk roaming the Wind Mill area and around Nun Lake; an unusual number of raptors and Turkey Vultures soaring above the day use area and park headquarters.

No one can ask for a better observation post than the park office. WOW! is the only thing I can say. Four Rivers Sector's Environmental Scientist Joanne Karlton and I spent several hours, after work, watching the wildlife around the park office. We saw dozens of Turkey Vultures soaring over and along the hillside of the Whisky Flat Trail. We watched several young hawks perch on the fence line and posts, along the road leading to the park office, learning how to hunt.



Inside the park office provided me an observation blind for wildlife observation. While sitting in the office, I saw a red tail hawk fly by the window and land on top of my patrol vehicle's tool box which was parked underneath the carport. The hawk walked back and forth for a few moments before flying off. I went to investigate what the hawk was going after. I found a small animal track

running up the back window and up the truck's cab. One luck ground squirrel made a remarkable escape from the talons of the Red Tail hawk.

The Rock Room in the park office provided me this Kodak moment. I was able to photograph this juvenile red-tailed hawk for several minutes while it was perching on the back garden fence.

Also seen in the park this summer were White-tailed Kites (formerly Black-shouldered Kite), Valley Quail, Western Bluebird, Coyote, Mule Deer does and fawn, Cottontail rabbits, Deer Mice, Rattlesnakes, Blue Belly Lizards and Alligator lizards.

Fall and winter are approaching and more wildlife can be seen in the park. So come on out and explore Pacheco SP and checkout the amazing vistas; you will be impressed.

